

The BLUE DOMERS and the MAGIC FLUTE

JEAN FINLEY







THE BLUE DOMERS
AND THE
MAGIC FLUTE

The
Blue Domers Series

BY
JEAN FINLEY

THE BLUE DOMERS

THE BLUE DOMERS' ALPHABET ZOO

THE BLUE DOMERS IN THE DEEP WOODS

THE BLUE DOMERS AND THE WISHING TREE

THE BLUE DOMERS UNDER WINTER SKIES

THE BLUE DOMERS AND THE MAGIC FLUTE



"Who's sick?" said Louise.
(Page 1)

(*The Blue Domers and the Magic Flute.*)

THE BLUE DOMERS SERIES

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By JEAN FINLEY



ILLUSTRATED

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The Blue Domers and the Magic Flute

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BLUE DOMERS AND THE MAGIC FLUTE

CHAPTER I.

THE SUGAR CAMP

“LOUISE ALLISON!” said Ted serverely, “I should think you’d know better than to bounce in like that where there’s sickness.”

“Who’s sick?” said Louise, glancing around the room.

“It’s all right, Weezy,” said Bert, “we’re only playing.”

“I’m the doctor,” said Ted, and Hally and Pep were both sick with rutabagas or something. Anyway, I’ve cured Hally and now I’m curing Pep.”

“Hally all nicey well,” said the three-year-old. “Hally take nassy bad mednies.

Hally stick out a tongue, say 'Ah,' Pep stick out a tongue."

"Pep's tongue is always out, and his tail is always wagging. Hurry up and cure him. I want to see you do it, and then I'll tell you something. . . Oh, I'm so excited I'm jumping up and down inside."

"Snap out of it, Pep. You're well," said Ted. "Now tell us, Weezy."

"Alice telephoned me, and something wonderful happened. Our own Grandpa found it out. There's some more to the farm, and it belongs to Alice, too, and they're going to sugar it, and we're invited."

"Weezy, what do you mean?" said Bert.

"Did she say 'sugar off'? Are there maple trees on it?"

Just then Grandpa came in. "This is a good sugar day. Frost last night, thawing hard now. We're all going to Alice's farm some day soon."

"I was just telling 'em, Grandpa," said

Weezy, that Alice telephoned me, we are to help get the sugar off the trees."

"Weezy," said Ted, "you lived in the city too long. You'll just never catch up with all the things you ought to know."

"Well, Alice didn't know either, and neither does Ruth."

"City girls."

"We'll probably go tomorrow," said Grandpa.

"O, Grandpa, are you invited too?" asked Weezy.

"Well, yes," said Grandpa, with a mischievous smile. "If I didn't go, there would be no sugaring off. You see, it's like this. You remember when old Mrs. Sinclair died, and they couldn't find out who owned the farm, Mr. Mullins came along and the township let him take the place and improve it. Then the Fresh Air people sent Alice out for two weeks, and Mr. and Mrs. Mullins wanted her to stay. Her grandfather, too.

"When Alice, digging a pond for her

ducks, found the letters that proved the farm was hers, there wasn't a word about this sugar grove. It's seven miles from the farm, beyond Norwood, and an old man has been running it on shares. He wasn't able to do anything last year, and hadn't even heard of Mrs. Sinclair's death.

"I went to see some old clocks that he has, and found him worrying because it was time to tap the trees; then I found out the grove belonged to Mrs. Sinclair, and so, of course, to Alice.

"But I found, too, that neither the Mullenses, nor Alice's grandfather, knew anything about sugar-making, so I've been going over there, bossing the job and working, too. We've got all the trees tapped, the sap has been running fine, and tomorrow we'll sugar off, I think. Old Mr. Martin had made the spiles. Dick Hubbard helped."

"Dick and 'Dorlu'?"

"Well, I don't suppose Doris and Lucia

did any of them, but it's nice work for a boy."

Grandpa left the room, and Louise turned on Ted: "I don't know a thing about it. Why do you have to run around and hit the trees? Where's the sugar? What's a sap and what's a spill?"

Ted began to laugh, but Louise was such a pretty little cousin; after all, why not tell her, instead of making fun of her.

"It isn't 'spill', it's 'spile,'" he said. "First, they bore a hole in a tree, on the sunny side, and they call that 'tapping the tree'. Then they put in a wooden spile. You can buy spiles now, with a hook on the end to hold the pail; but Grandpa said they made 'em, so that would mean wooden ones. Probably they have crocks on the ground to catch the sap. The sap looks like water. It flows down the spile, and drops into the crock. It's sweet. They call it sugar water."

"And then what do they do?"

“I’m not going to tell you one more thing.
Save something for a s’prise.”

“All right,” said Weezy. “Anyway, I know part of it.” But by the time she had run next door to tell Ruth Price, it was not very clear in her mind.

“Ruth,” she said, “what do you s’pose? We’re all invited to Alice’s. She’s got some more farm, and it has to be sugared. Grandpa thinks they’ll do it tomorrow, and we are going in the morning. May she go, Mrs. Price?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Ruth’s mother. “It is fun to go to a sugar camp. I shall never forget going once, when I was about your age.”

“Tell us all about it, Mother,” said Ruth.

But Mrs. Price was just like Ted. So they started off the next morning ready for surprises.

The air was warm, chickadees were fluttering about, snow melting rapidly, and as they came to the edge of the maple grove,

left the car and climbed over the fence, they could see the bare ground in the sled tracks, and the wet brown leaves.

“Look, Bert,” cried Ted, “Mr. Mullins is driving old ‘Iceberg’. Don’t you remember, Weezy? The old horse that scared us so, coming under the window in the middle of the night.”

Mr. Mullins walked beside the sled, and as they ran forward, up popped Alice from behind the barrels, then Dick Hubbard and his twin sisters.

“O, Dick! ‘Dorlu’! How did you get here? Isn’t this great.”

“Hop on the sled, girls,” said Mr. Mullins. “You can ride until the barrels are half full. We don’t give old Iceberg a very heavy load.”

Ruth and Weezy stood on the sled with Doris and Lucia, while Dick, Bert and Ted ran along beside it, helping to empty the crocks, under each maple tree, and carefully

replacing each crock so that none of the sap would be lost.

“Ruth,” said Weezy, “You see how it is, the sugar water runs down inside the tree and spills out of the spiles.”

“Ye—es, and then what do they do, I wonder?”

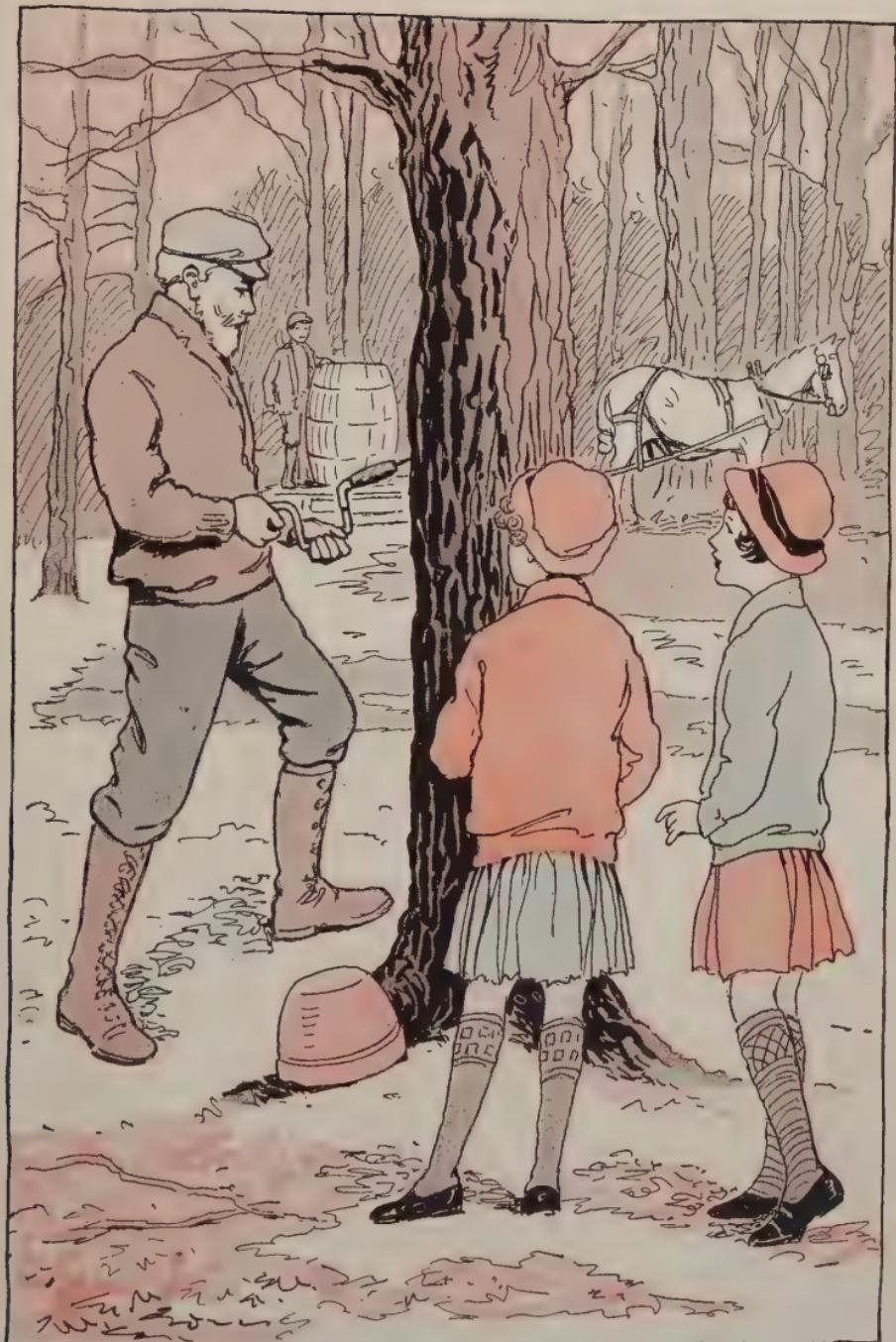
“We’ll see.”

When the barrels were half full, the girls jumped off, and were allowed to place the crocks under the trees again.

“Well,” said Grandpa, “I missed this tree. Please bring me the brace and bit, Ted. It’s right there in front of the barrels.”

It was very interesting to Ruth and Weezy, to watch the boring of a hole in the big maple, the fitting of a spile, and then the placing of a crock.

“The wind is just right for a good flow,” said Grandpa. “A northwest wind is just what we want. Maple trees are so sensitive a southeast wind would almost stop the flow.



It was very interesting to Ruth and Weezy to watch the
boring of a hole in the big maple.
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"Oh, look at the cute little house," called Weezy. "And there's Mrs. Mullins."

They all ran into the quaint little sugar house, delighted to see Mrs. Mullins, and so surprised to find that there were three enormous iron kettles, two filled with boiling sap, and one beginning to look dark and thick.

Grandpa tried a bit of this in a cup of cold water, then took a large ladle full of the dark mixture and called them all to follow.

Having found a patch of clean snow, he poured the hot syrup in seven places, one for each boy and girl.

"There," he said, "Don't burn your fingers."

"Oh, yummy. Sugar wax," shouted the boys.

Ruth and Weezy watched the others, and as soon as they dared, they picked up the warm, delicious mass, and had their first taste of new maple taffy.

“It’s the best stuff I ever tasted,” said Weezy.

“Bet I could eat a barrel of it,” said Bert.

“Alice, weren’t you s’prised when you heard about this place?”

“I had to just pinch myself, to be sure I wasn’t dreaming. I’m so glad we’ve got it. Just think, every year we can all come over and make this maple wax.”

“Look. They’re stirring off. Come on,” said Ted.

They all rushed in, and found that Grandpa had filled several large pie pans with the maple wax, and was now rapidly stirring what was left in the big kettle. Suddenly the whole liquid mass turned into sugar. This to Alice, Ruth and Weezy seemed a very wonderful thing, but the others had seen it in other sugar camps.

“We haven’t collected the sap from the lowland yet,” said Mr. Mullins.

“And sap runs best in low, mucky land,” said Grandpa. “Let’s go and get it. We’ll

all work hard. You youngsters can ride down and walk back."

Off they started, and before they had made the rounds of the trees, both barrels were full.

Once, as Lucia was carrying a crock full of sap to the sled, she began to laugh, and almost dropped it.

"Look, girls," she said. "Over there where I'm pointing. See the little squirrel taking a drink."

There he was, his two fore paws on the edge of the crock, drinking the sugar water greedily.

He looked so funny; such a comical expression of surprise, they all began to giggle, and away he dashed.

"I wonder where he lives," said Lucia.

"I wonder how many times a day he runs to get a drink."

"Ted, did you see the funny little squirrel?"

"Which one?"

“That little funny one with his paws on the crock. He looked as if he was holding it. We didn’t mean to scare him, but he made us laugh.”

“Grandpa says there’s a pan of sugar wax for everyone to take home, and Alice says we’re all to come again, if the sugar weather holds on.”

That evening, when Louise sat down to dinner with her father and mother, her Uncle Richard and Great-Aunt Lucy, she looked at one smiling face after another and said:

“It would be nice if we had a sugar woods; or just one tree of it. But Alice says it belongs to all of us Blue Domers, so it’s just as good.”

CHAPTER II.

SIGNS OF SPRING

BREAKFAST was over on the following Saturday, and Mrs. Graham said:

“Now let’s see how quickly we can all work. Ted, you can make all the beds. I’ll hurry through the dishes, and Bert, you must hop on your wheel, and go have that tooth out.”

“O, Mother, can’t I wait until next Saturday?” wailed Bert.

“No, Dr. Miller expects you this morning. As soon as we have finished all these duties, we are going to drive to Norwood, you know. The day will be much pleasanter for you with the tooth out.”

“Can’t Ted go with me?”

“Why, you old ’fraid cat,” said Ted. “Do you want me to go and hold your hand?”

“It won’t hurt very much,” said Mother, “and you must learn to take pain when it comes, and be brave about it. Hurry along, we want to get an early start.”

Bert marched off without another word, but when he reached Dr. Miller’s office, he hesitated at the door, finally turned the knob, and slid softly in. Alas, the doctor was there.

“Good morning, Bert. I suppose everything is quite salubrious with you this morning.”

“If you’re awfully busy,” said Burt, “I could just as well wait till next Saturday. I’d just as lieve as not.”

“O, I couldn’t have you suffer with tooth-ache for a week, even though I am busy.”

“Well, anyway, it’s stopped aching.”

“Probably. Let’s look at it.”

Bert sighed, and followed Dr. Miller to the hated room, where instruments of vari-

ous sizes seemed to grin at him with cruel mirth.

“Sit down there on the window sill a minute.” said Dr. Miller, “while I fix this novacaine. Tooth-pulling is nothing now. Just a prick of the needle is all that you feel.

“Your grandfather told me something cruel the other day. He said that when his father had a tooth out, there was only one way to do it. Just clamp the forceps down on the tooth and pull. Pull off and on for an hour maybe, and finally get it out. Nothing to relieve the pain.

“The dentist came to the house, took the patient to the kitchen, pulled him all around the room—think of it. And all *you* get is this little needle point. Come on, let’s see how quick we can be.”

Bert sat down in the chair and closed his eyes. He felt the needle, then waited, and at last said:

“Are you going to take it out pretty soon, Dr. Miller?”

“What! Is there another one?” asked the dentist. “There’s your tooth on the stand.”

“Gee whiz!” said Bert thankfully. “I never felt a thing but that little needle prick. I’m glad I wasn’t a boy along with my great-grandfather. I’ll never be afraid to come again.”

“Tooth out, Bert?” asked Ted, as he heard his brother’s cheerful whistle.

“Yes, want to see it?”

“My. It looks pretty big. Did it hurt?”

“What, that little old tooth? Naw,” said Bert scornfully.

“Mother and I are all ready. Let’s go hitch up.”

They ran to the little barn, pulled out the pony cart, then put on Zed’s harness, and led him out.

“Isn’t Zed tickled? He loves to go.”

“Prettiest pony in town.”

Ruth called from the window.

“How soon do you s’pose you’ll be back? Weezy says, be sure to bring Dick and ‘Dorlu’ and go right to her house. Lunch at Weezy’s. Isn’t that fine?”

“We’ll be back by ‘leven, I think. We’ll hurry.”

“Zed will come back home quicker than he’ll go over.”

Mother and Hally came out just then, locked the door, put the key back of the blind and, waving a good-morning to Ruth, climbed into the pony cart.

“Where you going, Hally?” asked Ruth.

“Hally go way off, wide on efelunt.”

“He thinks Laddie is an elephant. Laddie is such a good old dog. He always lets Hally ride on his back. Good-bye, see you at Weezy’s.”

Off they went, as fast as Ted could coax the lazy pony.

“When shall we come for you, Mother?” asked the boys as they drew near the Hub-

bards' home. Before she could answer, both boys burst out laughing.

"Look, Mother. Look, Hally, see your efelunt."

Mother laughed as heartily as the boys, for as they came up to the front gate, there was Laddie, shuffling about, with rubber boots on. A rubber boot on each foot. He was laughing, too, as collies will.

Mrs. Hubbard came out to greet them.

"How very funny Laddie looks. You ought to have a picture of him."

"Run, get your camera, Dick," said Mrs. Hubbard. "There's a new roll of films on the mantel."

Doris and Lucia came running out, dressed for a tramp in the woods. Dick took the picture, removed the rubber boots, and as he and his sisters climbed into the pony cart, the two mothers gave parting instructions.

"Come back no later than five, Ted."

"Dick, when you go to the woods, don't



There was Laddie shuffling about, with rubber boots on.
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let the girls walk around too much in the marshy places. Your rubber boots are higher than their galoshes.”

“We’ll be careful. We’ll remember. We’ll be here at five o’clock.”

“Go on, Zed. We’re going home.”

“First we go to Weezy’s,” said Ted, as they started off, “and have lunch there. And then we go to the woods.”

“Won’t that be fun. Let’s go see our house, that Paddy McQuoddy made.”

“I had a tooth pulled s’mornin’.”

“Didn’t we have fun with that wonderful house last summer?”

“Remember the day we found it.”

“It didn’t hurt a bit when he pulled it.”

“How long can we stay in the woods?”

“It takes half an hour to drive from Milford to Norwood.”

“Wish you lived in Milford.”

“It was a nawful big tooth.”

“My goodness, Bert,” said Ted, “don’t talk about that old tooth. Grandpa had

seventeen teeth pulled, and he didn't talk about it."

"Well, anyway, I could tell you something *awful* Dr. Miller told me."

"Forget it."

"Here we are. There's Weezy on the porch, and Ruth. Oh, there's Alice, too; all the Blue Domers, except Uncle Richard."

Luncheon was served on the glazed porch before an open fire. Joanna made delicious waffles for them and there was plenty of maple syrup to pour over them.

As soon as the lunch was over, they went to the woods at once, and had barely got inside the familiar place when a squirrel darted across the path.

"Remember what Uncle Richard told us about the little animals down in the ground, little underground people? Doesn't it seem funny that we're walking right over 'em? Do you s'pose they hear us?"

"O, Ted. Look what I've found," said Louise, with a little squeal of surprise.

“Violets. How could violets get in the woods?”

“Why, Weezy! They belong in the woods. Same as spring beauties and Jack-in-the-pulpit and mayflowers, and all the rest.”

“Oh, I see blood-root,” called Lucia. “Lots of it. Oh, the lovely things.”

“Here are spring beauties, in this sunny place.”

“Isn’t it wonderful,” said Ruth, “that we can pick them; that we can pick all we want?”

“Oh, I ’most found a Jack-in-the-pulpit.”

“Listen. What was that?”

“A bluebird.”

“There’s where the fallen tree was. Pad-dy McQuoddy got it all cleared up.”

“Here’s a squirrel pantry in this hollow tree. Look at the little apple. How could he carry it so far? I’ve a notion to eat it.”

“Why, Bert Graham. You wouldn’t steal from a squirrel, would you?”

“Naw—I should say not, but all he wants is the seeds. I’d leave the core for him.”

However, feeling that the others took the squirrel’s part, Bert put the apple back, and they went on to the wonderful house Paddy McQuoddy made.

There it was. Stout and strong as ever; the pretty rustic stairway winding up the tree. A few little mounds of snow were left on the shady side.

They climbed up, and found to their delight that the squirrels had used it as a store-room before the winter snows had come.

Acorns, hickory-nut shells and seeds littered the floor.

“Won’t we have fun cleaning house?” said Doris.

“We must start home,” said Ted. “By the time we’ve walked back, and stopped for more flowers and got some sassafras, it’ll be time to go back to Norwood.”

“Oh, how sweet. What was that Ted?” said Alice. “That wasn’t a bluebird.”

Faint and far off, soft and beautiful notes were heard.

“That isn’t a bird. It sounds way up in the big rocks. Way up where we’ve never been.”

“Would we dare to go some time?”

“Maybe, some nice summer day. We must hurry along now, or we’ll be late.”

“Let’s come back next Saturday. Perhaps we’ll hear it again. It sounds like—like fairy music.”

CHAPTER III.

AT ALICE'S FARM

THE April vacation had come. Ruth, Louise, Bert and Ted were at the farm for three days. In the mornings the girls flew around, helping put the house in order, washing the baby's clothes, and hanging them on the line. Out to the barnyard to see the little new pigs, or some fluffy little chicks chirping loudly in the bottom of a pail, where Mr. Mullins had placed them, until he could put the fussy mother hen safe in her coop. Such a pretty little coop, with a nice dry yard, for the chicks to run in.

“O, Mr. Mullins,” called Alice. “Look what's in this old coop, where we put Henrietta yesterday.”

Henrietta was an old speckled hen, very proud of her ten baby chicks and constantly clucking and calling, if they strayed too far away.

The coop had been propped up a few inches, so that the chicks could run in and out, while their mother had to stay inside.

But now the coop was down off its prop. Huddled in one corner, with ruffled feathers and angry scolding voice, crouched Henrietta, every chick hidden under her wings. In the other corner sat a little screech owl.

“Well, you little rascal,” laughed Mr. Mullins. “You’d better have been satisfied with field mice.”

The boys came running up. Henrietta scolded vigorously when she saw so many eyes peering in.

“What are you going to do with him, Mr. Mullins?” asked Dick. “I know a man who would stuff him for you. He’d look cute sitting up on Alice’s bookcase.”

“But we will need him to catch mice. I think I’ll put him in the pine tree.”

Mr. Mullins put on some heavy gloves, and while the boys raised the coop at that corner, he carefully caught the bird by his claws, held down his wings, and carried him to the evergreens.

“Now I’ll fix a little door for the chicks, until I can get a better coop.”

The children stood and watched the screech owl for a few minutes, sitting there on the limb like a very solemn judge.

“Isn’t it funny he sees at night, but hardly sees anything in the day-time?”

“Well, he’s made that way.”

“Alice,” called Mrs. Mullins, “I’ve just heard from an old neighbor of mine; such a dear old lady. She is coming to spend the day, and is bringing her granddaughter, Etta, who is about your age. I hope you can all have a nice afternoon together.”

“Yes’m,” said Alice without much enthusiasm. “We’ll try to give her a good time.”

The Blue Domers looked at each other, and then burst out laughing.

"Here we are looking so worried. She may be a real nice little girl," said Ruth.

"We had planned to go sailing our boats in the long brook, you know," said Bert.

"Well, we'll hurry and fix a boat for her."

"What shall we have for people?"

"Spools. If they go overboard, they can swim."

"Let's fix 'em right off."

Doris and Lucia could draw such funny faces, they soon had a lively group of "people" to sail in the boats.

The guests were late in arriving. Finally Mrs. Mullins said:

"We have waited an hour. It isn't fair to the rest of you. I can keep some things hot in the oven. Something must have happened to delay them."

"P'raps they're not coming," said Bert hopefully.

However, when the meal was half over, a car drove in, and there was old Mrs. Preston, her granddaughter, Etta, and a tall child, who was really the homeliest girl they had ever seen.

“This is my granddaughter, Etta,” said Mrs. Preston, “and this is Ollie Watson. They’re together all the time, so I thought I might as well bring her too.”

Dick immediately thought, “Got to make one more boat,” and presently he asked to be excused.

“Yes, Dick,” said Mrs. Mullins, “only you haven’t had your sponge cake.”

“I think it would taste awfully good while we’re walking along, over in the meadows.”

“So it would, Dick,” said Mrs. Mullins. “Almost anything tastes best out of doors.”

Dick slipped out, and began another boat. Bert and Ted soon followed, and by the time the seven girls came out, there was a boat for each one of the group.

"Poor Ollie is really ugly," thought Alice. "It just makes us uncomfor'ble to look at her."

"What a nawful nose she's got," thought Bert, "and all those freckles." Doris and Lucia, always with paper dolls in mind, were thinking, "If we were to draw a doll like Ollie, it would be a witch doll."

Ruth and Weezy were walking ahead in the sunshine. "I never saw such beautiul hair anywhere," said Ollie. "I've heard about Louise Allison, but I never saw her before. She's prettier than the prettiest doll in the world. Now *my* hair—it's sort of red, too, but it hasn't any shine. It looks just like the bricks in a chimney."

Then she laughed. Ruth, in telling her mother about it later, said: "She isn't a bit pretty, but we like her lots! And when she laughs, it's as if all the birds were singing."

"Why didn't we stay in the house?" whined Etta before they had gone across the first meadow.

“Don’t you like to sail boats?” asked Alice.

“Was that thing you gave me a boat? I threw it away. I didn’t want to carry it.”

“I could have carried it,” said Ollie good-naturedly.

“I don’t like it outdoors,” said Etta. “There’s nothing to look at, and no place to sit.”

“Wait till we start all the boats, and put the people in them. You’ll like that,” said Alice.

Spring rains had made the little brook a lively stream. The Blue Domers were delighted with it, and promptly forgot Etta.

“Let’s go up further, way up in the next field; we’ve got to have a quieter place to start ‘em.”

Up the field they ran, and threw themselves over the fence. With great care the little boats were placed in the water, and the spool people set on board. Then the boys found sticks to guide them.

"Look out now. Watch 'em! Weezy, don't let yours bump into that rock. There. Look. Mine turned all the way round."

"Man overboard!"

"He can swim."

"I'll get him. My boots are higher."

"Here he is. Tell him not to stand so near the edge."

"Look there," said Dick softly. "What's the matter with that Etta? She's crying."

"Oh, dear. Please watch my boat," said Alice; and, climbing over the fence, she ran back to Ollie and Etta.

"What's the matter? Did you hurt yourself?"

"I've got a headache," wailed Etta.

"Well, I should think crying would make it worse," said Alice sensibly.

"I always cry when my head aches. I'm going to make Grandmother take me home. I don't like it way out here in the country."

"It's too bad, Ettie," said Ollie. "I'm so

sorry. I wish you did like it. I do. It's so different, and I like these wide fields."

"I don't," sobbed Etta. "I'm going right home. Something stung me, too."

"Let's see," said Alice. "Oh, I guess it was just a yellow-jacket. 'Tisn't swollen."

Etta started toward the house, followed by the patient Ollie, and Alice, after calling to the others, reluctantly followed.

"I think Etta is just plain fussy. She didn't like the boats nor anything. She's going to miss lots of fun," said Ted.

"She's the kind that wouldn't want to go camping, unless she had rugs and a piano, and a 'lectric fan."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to go back, too," said Ruth. "We mustn't let poor Alice bear it all alone."

"Oh, codfish!" exclaimed Bert. "I don't want to go back. We'll have to do it, though."

"Bother it! Oh, well, maybe we can come over after they've gone."

“Yes,” said the others eagerly. “Let’s leave the boats in this safe little inlet, and come back afterward. See, the sticks will keep them in.”

When everything was safe, they ran over the fields, but did not catch up with the three girls till they reached the house.

Suddenly Etta turned upon the little crowd smilingly and said: “My head doesn’t ache. I just wanted to come back. I thought we could have more fun in the house.”

The Blue Domers looked at each other in great surprise.

“Why, but that’s a—,” Alice hesitated; “that’s an up and downer! We *never* tell ‘em. We never say anything to each other that isn’t true. Why, we couldn’t have such good times together if we told fibs, and couldn’t believe each other.”

“I don’t care,” said Etta. “I wanted to come back: and now I want to play in the house.”

“Do you want to play ‘Little Casino’?” asked Ollie.

“No. I want to play ‘Hide and Seek.’”

Ted did some quick thinking. He knew the others felt as he did. They wanted the fresh air and to be out under the blue dome of the sky.

“Let’s play ‘Yard Off’. That’s a hide-and-seek game.”

Etta consented, but only through curiosity.

Ted began to count out.

“One, two, three, four,
Mary at the cottage door.
Five, six, seven, eight,
Eating cherries off a plate.
O-U-T spells out.”

“I don’t want to be ‘It’,” said Etta with her usual whine.

“I’ll be ‘It’,” said Ollie. “I’d just as soon. How do we play it?”

“We'll show you. This little maple is the goal, and this half a broom handle is the stick. Now lean the stick against the tree, and count a hundred while we hide.

“You can count by fives if you want to.”

Off they ran, while Ollie counted; face against the tree, eyes covered. Ollie was quick. In no time she had caught Dick peering around the corner of the barn.

Dick began to count, “Five, ten, fifteen, twenty,” and so on. Then, opening his eyes, he cried:

“Bushel of wheat
A bushel of rye.
All not ready,
Call out ‘I.’”

Not a sound, so he crept cautiously, farther and farther from the maple tree. Suddenly Bert dashed up, grabbed the stick, threw it as far as he could, and shouted:

“Yard Off! Gimme twenty-five!”

Dick had to return to the goal and count one, two, three, till he reached twenty-five.

By this time Etta was in tears again.

"I don't want to play this game," she wailed. "If you're going to play this game, *I'm* not going to play."

"What do you want to play?" asked Ollie.

"I want to play something in the house."

They gave up to her, because she was their guest. So all that golden afternoon was spent indoors; while out in the sunshine larks sang overhead, frogs sang their meadow music, and the little boats waited in the long brook.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAST EXPRESS

“BERT and Ted are up to something,” said Ruth as she stood at the sink, washing the breakfast dishes. “They won’t tell us. They’ve got Dick over for the day, but they won’t tell whether Doris and Lucia are coming, nor anything at all, except that we’re going traveling.”

“Aren’t they just the aggravatin’est things? Do you know what they’re making, Mother?”

“No, but they borrowed two old ponchos and a small pillow.”

“They borrowed Weezy’s wagon. She never uses it anyway, and there are two boys

I never saw before, out there in the little barn, and they brought their wagons."

"I saw Ted carrying a big old-fashioned dinner bell. I don't know where he got it, and I can't imagine what he's going to do with it."

"Here comes Weezy. Can't we ask her to stay for lunch?"

"Yes, I'm always glad to have her."

"Weezy, can you stay for lunch?" asked Ruth before Louise was fairly inside the door.

"Why, I came to ask you. Joanna has made some of the prettiest little chicken turnovers."

"O, yummy. May I go, Mother?"

"Yes, dear, but be sure you are ready for traveling, if the boys call for you. Better wear your blue sweater."

As the two girls walked across the beautiful grounds of Weezy's home, they found Andrew raking dead leaves from the lawn,

and stopped at the pool, where the goldfish were rejoicing in the warm April air.

“Andrew put ‘em out this morning,” said Weezy. “They don’t mind a few cold nights. They look just as happy as the birds.”

“Most everything likes to be outdoors except poor Etta. Wasn’t she queer? I feel so sorry for Ollie with just a fussy Etta to play with.”

“Ruth, what do you s’pose? This morning I was out early with Uncle Richard, and when we passed the woods we heard the music again. We couldn’t see anybody. The music just came out of the rocks. It seems like magic.”

“I wish the boys would go to the woods this afternoon.”

As they ran in the side door, sniffing chicken turnovers and hot gingerbread, Great-Aunt Lucy met them with a smile.

“I am very glad to see that you are not nervous over your trip,” she said. “Some-

times these long journeys are very trying.
I have packed your bags."

Ruth and Weezy looked at the two old traveling bags, and giggled. They knew at once that Aunt Lucy had been told what the boys were doing, and that she had found old bags that could be tossed carelessly about.

As they were finishing the last crumbs of their gingerbread, they heard a mighty noise. The rattle of wheels on the pavement, shrill whistles, and the clang of a big bell.

"It's the boys. Hurry. Where's my sweater? Here's your hat, Ruth. We don't need rubbers. My! What a racket! Good-bye, Aunt Lucy."

"Good-bye. Safe journey."

They flew out the front door, all excitement, the old bags bumping at their sides.

"All abo—o—ard!" shouted Ted, who was evidently the conductor.

Bert was the engineer, and sat in a good-sized toy automobile belonging to little Jim-

my Connor. This made a fine engine. Jimmy sat in the "coal car", which was half full of coal, and proudly rang the big dinner bell, loaned by a good-natured farmer.

"Here y'are, ladies," said the conductor. "Will you take a sleeper, or a day coach? This is a coach. P'raps you'd rather ride in the observation car?"

The girls looked it over with much dignity. Behind the coal car was the baggage car, where their bags were quickly placed. Next came the smoker. Real smoke issued from this, but a peep inside showed pieces of punk, stuck in a raw potato.

There were nine wagons in all, besides the engine. Those that were uncovered were the day coaches; but four of the wagons had packing boxes fastened on them, open at each end and with windows cut in the sides. These were the Pullman sleepers, and from one of them loud snores were heard.

This proved to be Dick. What difference

did it make if his feet did stick out behind? Dick was growing so fast.

In another sleeper was a fat, lazy boy, named Joe Benton. Of course, a Pullman sleeper was his first choice.

“You’ll have to ride in the observation car,” announced the conductor. “All our sleepers are taken.”

“Who’s in this one?” asked Ruth, pulling aside the poncho.

Up popped Lucia, and Doris put her hand out of one of the little windows in the next sleeper. Too small for her head.

“All aboar—rd!” shouted the conductor. “Ding. Ding. Ding. Honk!”

As the train was long and unwieldy, the conductor was obliged to pull the engine now and then, while the engineer rested his legs; but the end of each block was a station.

Mrs. Martin called to them from her back porch, where she was hanging out her tea-towels.

“Is your train going to California?”

“Not this afternoon,” said the conductor.
“Mebbe tomorrow. We’re going to Niagara Falls now.”

At the next corner the train stopped.

“Tell you what,” said the engineer, “we ought to have a diner.”

“That’s right,” said the fat passenger, crawling out of his Pullman.

“Let’s see what Aunt Lucy put in our bags,” said Weezy. “Oh, look. Here’s apples and bananas. What’s in yours, Ruth?”

“Sweet crackers and cookies.”

“A dozen bananas. That’s one apiece and three over.”

“Three times three are nine. Got your knife, Ted? Cut each of ‘em in three.”

“There we are. Lots of apples, and crackers. Better divide the cookies.”

“Look! Look! Up the street. Talk about Niagara Falls! Hurry up. All aboard! Ring the bell, Jimmy. Ring hard!”

Mrs. Peters, hearing the racket, ran to the

door to see what was going on, but, seeing that a water main had burst, ran back and telephoned the water company; so, by the time the train arrived at "Niagara Falls" the flow of water had grown less, and then it stopped altogether.

"Blooeey! Wasn't that fine while it lasted?"

"We might as well go to California now."

"Where is it?"

"Let's say it is at the end of Spring Street."

"No, we'd have a fierce time of it, climbing the hill again."

"Down Elm Street then."

"Or the park. Let's go to the park. The pond will do for the Pacific Ocean."

"Wait a minute, Conductor," said Ruth. "I think we'd like to run on ahead and see how the train looks."

"That's a good idea," said the engineer, whose legs were very tired.

The four girls ran the last long block to the park, and dropped down on a bench.

“It is really a wonderful train,” panted Weezy.

“That observation car is awfully bumpy.”

“My goodness! You ought to try a sleeper. The sleepers haven’t got rubber tires.”

With a screech and a rattle, and loud clang of the big farm bell, the train drew up beside the bench and stopped.

It was then discovered that fat little Joey was sound asleep in his Pullman.

“Let him sleep, for goodness sake,” said Bert. “He’s been wantin’ to be the engineer, an’ he wouldn’t last a block.”

“Let’s walk around a little and see the sights of California,” said Ruth.

“Here’s the Pacific,” said Doris, trying to talk like a teacher.

“The Pacific Ocean, children, was discovered by Balboa, and it’s still here.”

Ruth began to pace haughtily up and down the gravel walk.

“I wish a taxi,” she said, “at once. Where is the finest hotel?”

Dick hastily untied the observation car, dashed up to Ruth, swung the wagon around with a flourish, and said:

“Taxi, Madam? Do you wish to go to the Popocatapetl?”

Ruth took her seat very airily, and was rattled over to another bench.

Then Weezy arrived, while Ted secured another taxi, and deposited Doris and Lucia at Hotel Lollypop.

In the meanwhile, Joey continued to sleep, but Jimmy had deserted the coal car, climbed into the engine, and made off with it.

A small group of Boy Scouts passed by. Bert, Ted and Dick were gazing after them, longing for the time when they, too, could be Scouts; and, at first, Jimmy and the engine were not missed. Then Ted sprang to his feet and yelled:

“Look, Jimmy’s going down hill.”

The three boys tore after him; but the hill

was steep, Jimmy's feet flew off the pedals, and the poor little automobile, which was trying so far to be a locomotive, threw Jimmy face down upon the path, and plunged itself into the gutter.

With great presence of mind, Bert turned and ran after the Scouts, while Ted and Dick lifted Jimmy and placed him in the grass.

The Scouts came running up. Ted got water from the fountain, and they bathed the deep cut on Jimmy's forehead, bound it with gauze, made sure no bones were broken, and then, finding that the travelers were some distance from home, good-naturedly offered to help with the train.

One of the Scouts, who was very strong, had not forgotten how to make a wagon go very rapidly by sitting in it, and pushing with one foot on the pavemnt.

Jimmy was made comfortable in one of the Pullmans, which was now called an ambulance, and, to take his mind from his

wound, was allowed to ring the bell all the way home.

His mother, seeing him arrive in this lively manner, was not alarmed, especially as the Scouts had bandaged the cut so neatly.

“His car ran away with him,” explained Ted, “went down hill, and turned over. It was lucky the Scouts were there. Here’s your car, Jimmy. Sorry you got such a bump.”

One after another the wagons were returned; then those remaining were tied together and the girls were given a wild ride home.

CHAPTER V.

MUSIC IN THE ROCKS

ON a warm Saturday, toward the end of April, Louise came running down to the arched gate between her home and the Grahams', waving something in her hand.

“Ted, Bert, Ruth,” she called. “Uncle Richard let me take his field glass. He says if we’ll be awully careful, we can have it all day, and study birds in the woods.”

“That’ll be fun.”

“Maybe Mother will let us take her opera glass. I’ll ask her.”

Bert dashed into the house, and soon came back with the opera glass.

“She says we mustn’t lose it, and she wants us to take Hally——”

“Goodness. We don’t want Hally when we’re studying birds.”

“She wants us to take Hally to Bobby Hunter’s birthday party. She’ll go after him.”

“Oh.”

“Goody. Is he ready?”

“Just a minute.”

“Oh,” said the girls as Hally came out. “Doesn’t he look too cute for anything.”

“Hally got new shoes.”

“Beautiful.”

“Hally got new hat.”

“Wonderful.”

“Hally got new unawares.”

“Well, come on. Let’s go. Good-bye, Mother. We’ll bring you some violets.”

They had to walk sedately until they reached Bobby Hunter’s and left Hally, spotless and dignified, at the door. Then they ran to the fields and on to the woods.

“Let’s go a new way. Let’s go toward the rocks,” said Weezy.

“Yes, let’s.”

“P’raps we’ll find a kingfisher’s nest.”

“There’s a bluejay.”

“Uncle Richard says the best way to find birds is to sit still and let them find you.”

“See that log, way down there with the May apples growing thick all around it? Let’s go and sit there and keep *very* still, so that the birds will just think we’re part of the log.”

Very softly the four stole along under the trees, and, reaching the log, became a part of it. Not a word; not a movement. They well knew that if they kept very still, the little wild things would flutter near them.

Piercing the stillness, came the strange, sweet music from the rocks. Weezy caught Ruth’s hand. The four sat breathless till the last note melted on the April air.

“What is it? What is it?”

They forgot the birds, and sat there, staring at the rocks, hoping to hear the sweet notes again. At last Ruth said:

“Can you see anybody?”

“I can’t,” said Ted. “Can you, Weezy?”

“I almost can see him. I think he’s a Prince, and a fairy makes him stay——”

“Aw, nix on that fairy fairy stuff.”

“Why, Bert Graham,” said Ted severely. “That’s not polite, and you didn’t let her finish.”

“Beg your pardon, Weezy,” said Bert quickly, “but I do like things that are realer.”

“Well, then,” said Weezy, “who do *you* think it could be?”

“Well,” said Bert, “I don’t know. It might be a sort of a left-over pirate, that can’t go pirating any more.”

Ruth had picked up the field glass. “I believe I see somebody. I saw something move. You look, Ted.”

“No,” said Ted, “I only saw some dogwood blossoms.”

“Oh, listen.”

Once more the sweet tones.

It's a flute," said Weezy. "I've heard 'em at the opera."

"O, Weezy. Have you been to the opera?"

"I've been twice. Uncle Richard took me. One time he thought it was 'Hansel and Gretel', but it was 'The Magic Flute', and the next time it *was* 'Hansel and Gretel'."

"'The Magic Flute.' Let's call this 'The Magic Flute,' 'cause it doesn't act like a real flute and somebody playing it."

"I wish we could see the man. Let's go nearer."

Walking on softly, they reached a sheltered place quite near the rocks, and sat down on a large boulder.

"How could anybody climb way up there?" asked Weezy in a whisper. "The rocks go straight up."

"Sh. Don't let him hear you."

"He must be alone," whispered Ruth. "There's nothing but music. Nobody talking. Oh, I'd be frightened way up on these rocks alone."

“A man isn’t afraid,” said Bert, as he glanced at his wrist watch. It had stopped, as usual. Ted looked at the sun.

“We’ve got to go, right off. We’re not very near home.”

Then, because they were in a part of the woods that was new to them, and because of the mysterious music which seemed to steal out from the cold stones, they began to have a little creepy feeling, and suddenly they ran as if something were after them.

When they reached the familiar part of the woods, where they had so often played, all four stopped and laughed.

“Wasn’t that funny?” panted Ruth. “I felt sort of scared, but I don’t know what I was scared of.”

“Let’s not tell anybody about the ‘Magic Flute’, let’s have it for a secret.”

“Let’s come as often as we can, and try to find out, but not tell anybody.”

“Well, then, let’s say what Alice taught us.”

The four clasped hands and repeated the words:

“If you tell me a secret, it’s a stone dropped in deep water.”

It was hard to wait a week before they could go again to the woods, and then, when Saturday came at last, it was raining.

“Bother it!” said Bert. “What’ll we do, Ted?”

“Let’s go out to the barn and curry Zed; and then we can wash the pony cart, and if we work hard, without noticing the weather very much, the sun may come out.”

“There’s Uncle Richard. He’s brought Weezy over to spend the day with Ruth. I hope they’ll make candy or something.”

But the girls had planned to make cookies. They were eager to try the new cooky cutters, and see how many different shapes they could make.

First they made the dough and divided it into three parts. The first was plain vanilla, the second spices, and the third chocolate.

“Let’s cut out the chocolate first,” said Weezy, “and put nuts on top. Raisins on the spicy ones, and then what on the vanilla cookies?”

“Why don’t you put a little merangue on them? That would puff up and be very pretty,” said Ruth’s mother, who believed in letting the girls do everything themselves, but usually hovering near them, perched upon a stool, a sort of innocent bystander.

“Oh, wouldn’t that be fine. Let’s try it, Ruth.”

“All right. Let’s leave them for the last.”

Suddenly there was a strange sound upstairs, as of something being dragged over the floor.

“It’s Woodsy, bad little pup,” said Mrs. Price. “I’ll go, Ruth; you have your hands in the dough.”

But just then the pup came into the kitchen, dragging the scrap basket. He was growling, and shaking it about. The basket was empty, but that was because it had been

tipped over a great many times. Waste papers and all sorts of odds and ends were scattered along the hall.

“Woodsy,” said Mrs. Price, “you are a naughty little pup, but I am glad you have not broken the basket. Take it upstairs again, Ruth, and the papers can be put into the fireplace.”

Ruth worked quickly, and was soon back in the kitchen, putting raisins on the cookies.

Thump! Thump! There was the basket coming downstairs again. It had a heavy sound, because the pup had crawled into it, and couldn’t get out until he reached the bottom. He then decided to crawl under a chair and chew the rocker, which kept him quiet for some time.

The cookies looked so pretty on the lunch table, and the young cooks were pink-cheeked and happy at their success.

Bert came up to the window. “The sun’s coming out. Want to go to the woods this afternoon?”

“Oh, yes. How soon?”

“ ‘Bout half an hour.”

“Aren’t we glad we washed all the cookie pans and things, while Mother was getting lunch?” said Ruth. “It won’t take long to do these dishes.”

“I’ll do them,” said Mother. “I think it’s my turn and you need the sunshine.”

Not long after, the four Blue Domers started on the run.

“Let’s hurry, and take all the short-cuts we can, so that we’ll have more time at the rocks.”

“Perhaps the ‘Magic Flute’ won’t be there.”

“We’ll soon see. And this time we’re not going to get scared, no matter what happens.”

When they reached the rocks, they stole as softly as Indians, till they reached their big boulder, and dropped down upon it.

Then they waited, with the patience of Indians, but not a sound did they hear.

Suddenly Weezy whispered: "Look. I see something. It's a *foot*. A *bare foot*."

"My goodness. It is. It's a boy's foot."

"It's awfully early to go barefooted. Let's walk along very quietly and see if we can't see him better."

They slipped softly farther.

"Why, Ted. It's just a boy. No bigger than Dick."

There he stood, a pale, thin boy with ragged clothes. Slowly he raised his flute to his lips, and then, catching sight of them, gave one frightened look, and vanished right before their eyes.

Weezy did not know till she reached the meadow that she was holding tight to Ted's hand. Bert and Ruth caught up with them, panting from the long run.

"How *could* he do it? How could he just disappear like that? I'm so scared."

Weezy drew a long breath and said: "Of course, Ruth and I like to *pretend* that there are fairies and witches and all that. And

of course, we know it's all pretending, but, Ted, what do you think? Was that a real boy? How could he just disappear like that?"

"I don't know," said Ted. "We all saw him, and then, all at once, he just wasn't there."

"Do you 'spose there could be—could there possibly be any fairies or witches, or anything?"

"No," said Ted stoutly. "When we get here in the meadow, we *know* there are none of these things, but up there by the rocks, it's so still and sort of scary. I was just plain scared, but it seems foolish now."

"Well, anyway," said Bert. "He isn't a pirate. By next Saturday, or maybe by the Saturday after that, we'll probably go again."

"'Course we will," said Ted.

"Maybe we will," said Ruth.

"P'raps," said Weezy faintly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILD ANIMAL SHOW

IT was Friday afternoon. Ruth and Louise were walking home from school.

“Ruth,” said Louise, “do you s’pose the boys will want to go to the woods tomorrow?”

“They said this morning they were going to make some wild animals, and have a show in Mr. Davis’ old barn ’cross the street.

“That would be fun. Alice is coming to stay all day.”

“Goody. Dick and ‘Dorlu’ are coming, and they’re going to bring Laddie.”

“Isn’t that jolly?”

The two girls sat in the grass by the arched gate, talking as girls do. They were roused by the rattle of the boys’ wagons.

“What *are* you going to do with all that old stovepipe?” asked Ruth, jumping to her feet and running over to the Grahams’ yard, followed by Weezy.

“Something funny. Want to help us? We’re going to do all we can tonight, and tomorrow we’ll get up early and work hard. Dick and ‘Dorlu’ are coming, and the show will be in the afternoon. We didn’t think of it till this morning, so we’ve got to work hard.”

They talked and planned. By morning it was well thought out and much of the work done.

“We can’t possibly have the show today. Not till next Saturday, I guess. Mother is making the elephants’ trunk now, but we’ve got to get two barrels, and make a clown suit, and lots of things.”

“Hooray! There’s Dick and ‘Dorlu’. And Laddie. What has Laddie got on? An old fur coat. Doesn’t he look funny?”

“Mother thinks it would be nice to make ever so many animals, and put posters up, so lots of people will come,” said Doris.

“And she says,” added Lucia, “Why not make lemonade and popcorn balls, and charge admission. Then the money can go to the Fresh Air people. She says Blue Domers must have thought of that in the first place.”

“Oh, there’s Alice. Hello, Alice. Now we’re all here.”

How they planned and worked. After many attempts, and much running over to study the pony and measure his head, Doris and Lucia managed to make a very good pony head out of paper bags stuffed with excelsior; ears like Zed’s, and a white star on the forehead.

The boys got some carpenters’ horses, saying as they passed the girls, “These things have four legs, you’ll see what fine animals we’ll make out of ‘em.”

Late in the afternoon they called the girls

to come and see the elephants. Then merry laughter sounded from the barn.

“Oh, aren’t they the funniest things?”

“How do you move the trunk that way?”

“They’re the wonderfulest elephants.”

“We’ll show you how they’re fixed. You see, we took the carpenters’ horses, and fastened a barrel on each one, firm and tight. Then we took old brown overalls, and those old ponchos. That fixed the legs and body all right, but we couldn’t get the heads right. Then we found some old stove pipe, and furnace pipes with elbows, and fixed the head with that.

“Of course, you can see the trunk is old stockings sewed together. Bert is inside the barrel, and he can run his hand and arm down inside and make the trunk swing.”

All at once, down inside the elephant, they could hear the strains of “Yankee Doodle,” played upon a jews-harp. Then Bert crawled out, all black from the stove pipe, but smiling cheerfully.

“I’ve thought of something,” he said. “We could put a little phonograph or radio inside the elephant, and it would sound awfully funny.”

“Radio would be best.”

“But what if there were no stations on?”

“Oh, there’s always something; we can look it up in the paper, and set it for some busy station before we put it in.”

“Yes. Let’s do it.”

“Here’s another animal. We don’t know what to call it. You see, we took a little table and put two old fur coats on it; the table legs are the sleeves. Don’t they look fine? We haven’t fixed the head and tail yet. And here’s a big dragon, all made out of stove pipe. Doesn’t he look fierce? We’re going to put a lantern in his head, so his eyes will look fiery.

“Well, come on, Ted, let’s finish the crocodile. Where’s any more corrugated paste-board?”

All their spare time the next week was put

on the preparations for the show. How they watched the weather. But Saturday was warm and clear. The crowd came; many more than were expected, so that the popcorn balls and lemonade were soon gone. Ice-cream cones were brought in as quickly as possible.

The barn had been thoroughly cleaned and decorated, with crepe paper, red and white, hung from the highest beams. From the beams also hung two trapezes, with two funny clowns, one hanging by his teeth and one by his heels. Just at first, everyone thought they were real live clowns, with false faces.

Another clown, about eight feet high, who was really Dick on stilts, stalked about behind a railing, where the crowd could not trip him up. He had balloons for sale.

The animals were in all sorts of cages, made of boxes, with laths for slats. One was marked "Beware the Lion." In one corner of the box, sound asleep, was a large yellow

cat, with part of a fur collar around his neck.

In one of the stalls, tied firmly with a piece of heavy rope, was an animal marked "The Whatchathink. Very fierce and rare." This was the creature made out of the little table and the fur coats. The head was a black fur muff with yellow eyes sewed on it, and large teeth, cut from heavy white cardboard.

Zed had been made into a two-headed pony by tying on the head the girls had made.

Laddie looked rather uncomfortable with an old-fashioned fur rug added to his own heavy coat. He was marked, "Wonderful Polar Bear, caught in the wilds of Pennsyltucky."

"The Dangerous Dragon" was quite frightful, with a red lantern in his head to make his eyes bright, and a red flannel tongue, hanging over his horrible pasteboard teeth.

A tame goose was decorated with many

old ostrich feathers and labeled "The Goose-trich. Only one on Earth."

Next to this freak was a very strange creature. Part shoe box, part tin can, with a feather-duster tail and a hen's head. Undoubtedly it was some kind of a hen. Judge Blakely leaned over to read the card, "Don't be scared. It is only an Alarm Cluck," and just then the alarm went off.

About this time, two little dwarfs were brought in, in two gaily decorated wagons. They were lifted over beside the giant balloon man. How very small they were. They were elaborately dressed in many lace curtains, and wore wonderful bonnets.

"Of course," said Weezy's mother, who did not know the secret, "I can see that it is Doris and Lucia. Their black curls just will not stay inside the bonnets, but how do they make themselves so short?"

"Don't you see?" said Aunt Lucy, "they are walking on their knees. The long trains cover their feet."

Ruth and Weezy wore large straw hats, pulled down over their faces, with plenty of holes in the straw, to see through. They walked backward most of the time, because they had false faces on the back of their heads; their own faces being completely hidden by the hats. They looked all wrong, no matter which way they walked.

Of course, the crowd wanted to feed the elephants, which were standing quietly side by side; but while one elephant greedily took all the peanuts his trunk could reach, the other stood perfectly still.

Just as the crowd was greatest, there issued from the interior of the quiet elephant, "Gr-rr-rrrrrrr, Br-rr-rrrrrrr. This is station da, da, da, dit, da, dit, gr-r-r. Miss Tralala McScreech will now give us a half hour of old-time songs. Br-rr-rrrrrrr."

"Gee whiz!" said Bert, inside the other elephant, "That radio isn't tuned right. I wonder where Ted is. He ought to fix it. I can't leave these peanuts."

Ted climbed up on top of a stall to reach Dick's ear. "Do something funny, Dick, so the crowd will come this way. I've got to climb into the elephant and fix the radio."

Dick and the "Dwarfs" began to sing a funny song, which drew the crowd away. Ted watched his chance, slipped into the elephant and patiently worked the dials till clear tones came again. He crawled out quickly, much pleased with the wonderful elephant.

The crowd returned, to hear "Old Kentucky Home," but again there came a doleful "gr-rr-rrrrrr" and then, loud and clear:

"Cotton quiet, but steady. Butter firm. Tallow quiet and unchanged."

"Oh, Codfish!" said Bert, still busily reaching for peanuts. "Can't that old radio pick up something besides market reports?"

But the crowd laughed. It was so funny to hear the familiar voice of a radio announcer issuing from a make-believe elephant.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE FLUTE

“RIGHT this way, ladies and gentlemen. No extra charge. Come, hear the Musical Sunflowers. Ask for any song you like.”

The crowd moved to a corner of the barn where a piece of black cotton cloth, as large as a sheet, had been stretched across. On this, sunflowers were painted, whose centers had been cut out, and in the openings appeared the faces of Alice, Louise, Ruth, Doris and Lucia.

They sang so prettily together, one sweet old song after another. The crowd was delighted. Finally Ted said, “Now ask for any song you like.”

“Old Kentucky Home,” said someone in the crowd.

Instantly the Sunflowers sang:

“Go tell Aunt Rhody,
Go tell Aunt Rhody,
Go tell Aunt Rhody,
Her old gray goose is dead.”

“There,” said Ted, triumphantly. “Now somebody else got a choice?”

“Swanee River,” said Mr. Davis.

“Go tell Aunt Rhody,” drawled the Sunflowers, and suddenly went to sleep. The crowd laughed, and moved on.

Dick, having sold all his balloons, came down from his stilts and slipped into a bear-skin coat. As he was about to put on the bear’s head, which had been made out of an old fur cap, a man came up to him; a strange man, dark as an Indian. Looking at Dick intently, he said:

“Are you David Kent?”

“No, sir, I am Dick Hubbard.”

“Do you know David Kent? Is he here?”

“I never heard of him, but, then, I don’t live here in Milford. I live in Norwood, across the river.”

The man thanked him and went on.

Dick put on his bear’s head, with a tin collar around his neck, to which was fastened a heavy iron chain. Hally, dressed as a very fat little clown, then led him to the corner where the elephants stood, and Ted hooked the chain to a ring on the floor.

Sometimes the bear dropped on all fours, and the little clown climbed on his back. Or the clown played a drum and the bear danced.

Laddie grew tired of the heavy fur rug, so they took it off, put on the four rubber boots instead, and standing him in the water trough, called him a dogfish.

A merry little song bubbled forth from the quiet khaki elephant, and the crowd drew near.

“This is certainly a wonderful little elephant,” said Mr. Hubbard, “and here he is, about to give us the correct time. At any rate, I think it is time for some of us to go home. It has been a very fine show. I’ve enjoyed it immensely, but I think the admission should have been more than five cents, so I suggest that the elephant pass the hat. Let’s feed him a little silver instead of peanuts, since the money is for the Fresh Air Fund.”

He picked up a hat, and placed it so that Bert, with his hand down in the trunk, could grasp the rim, and, as a good start, dropped in a five-dollar bill.

It was fun for Bert, who could not see, but could feel the hat growing heavier. It was fun for the crowd, too, who dropped in dimes, quarters, fifty-cent pieces and many a dollar bill.

Just as Bert was getting too tired to hold the hat much longer, he heard Ted’s voice:

“Come on out, Bert. ‘Most everybody’s gone. I’ll take care of the hat.’”

Bert gladly crawled out. Ted grabbed his arm. “See that tall man by the gate? He came up to me just a few minutes ago, and looked at me so hard; and then he said, ‘Do you know David Kent?’ and I said ‘No,’ and he looked surprised.”

“He’s sort of queer. He’s so dark. Looks as if he’d always been outdoors.”

“Look. He’s talking to Uncle Richard. Wonder if he knows Uncle Richard is a doctor. There they are, walking off together. They’re going to the office.”

“Well, come on. We’ve got lots to do getting all these animals home and counting the money. Wasn’t it a great show? ‘Course I couldn’t see much of it, inside the elephant. Lucia brought me an ice-cream cone, and so did Doris. Ruth and Weezy did, too; and I had lots of peanuts.”

Dick and “Dorlu” came up. “Too bad we have to go soon, but we’ll have time to

pick up our own things. Wasn't it fun? Everybody says it was a fine show."

"Here comes Uncle Richard."

Weezy ran to meet him. "Was that man an Indian, Uncle Richard?" she asked.

"No, he has been with a party of explorers in South America for almost two years; outdoors all the time. He is *very* interesting, a fine man. I have asked him to spend a few days with us. You will all enjoy hearing him tell about his wonderful adventures.

"Now I have some bad news for you. Excuse these few pearly tears," he said, holding his hat as if to catch them. "There's a notice in the post office, 'No school Monday.' Isn't that heartbreaking?"

"Hooray! Let's go to the woods. We haven't been for so long."

After the pleasant Saturday, Sunday, too, was clear and beautiful, but Monday it looked like rain.

"Oh, ducks!" growled Bert. "Look what a day we've got."

“Betcha it’ll pour pretty soon,” said Ted.

But Hally asked earnestly: “If it was rainy weather, and it was raining, and I’d go outdoors an’ open my mouf, and get it in the right place, wouldn’t I get a drink.”

The boys had to laugh, and just then the rain came down, a sudden hard shower.

“Never mind,” said Grandpa, “ ‘Rain before seven, clear before eleven.’ See if there is a bit of blue sky in the north.”

“Yes, Grandpa, there’s a lot of blue sky there.”

“Then you’ll see, it will clear before long.”

As usual, Grandpa was right, and soon the boys were busy packing a basket of sandwiches. Ruth and Louise came with cookies and fruit, and the four started to the woods.

They did not go to the tree house, nor stop in the ravine to play, but walked toward the rocks, talking very little as they went along.

At last Ted said: “We’re going where we went the last time; we’re going to sit on the

log, and if we hear the flute, and see that boy, and if he does any more *vanishing*, just going off into nothing at all, *we're going to sit right there on the log.*"

"And watch how he un-vanishes," said Ruth.

"Yes, that's what we're going to do. We're too old to be scared like that; and if any of you do get scared, shut your eyes if you want to, but *stay on the log.*"

"All right, we will," they agreed. Moving forward softly, they came to the log and sat down; peering through the leaves and listening for the magic tones of the flute.

But there was no sound until Weezy softly whispered:

"I see him. Look. Farther down on another rock. O, Ted, he's crying. I'm going up there. I'll find the way."

But Ted held her arm. "You mustn't go, Weezy. And, anyway, he wouldn't want us to see him crying. Let's go back and come again later on."

“But, Ted, perhaps he’s sick.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want anybody to see me crying, sick or well, and he’s bigger than I am. Let’s go and play something and come back.”

“Let’s play Yard Off,” said Ruth when they had reached the more familiar ground. “And when it’s time for lunch, let’s sweep out the tree-house and have lunch there.”

“We can’t play Yard Off in the woods; there are too many trees,” said Bert. “Let’s just play regular Hide and Seek.”

In the first counting out, Weezy was “It.” Very soon she caught Bert, who almost immediately caught her again.

Then Weezy caught Ruth, and as she scampered over the leaves to find a better hiding place, she was saying to herself, “They won’t find me this time. I’ve been ‘It’ twice, so now I’m going farther.”

To her delight, she came upon a large hollow tree and slipped into it. It was quite

far from the goal, but she could faintly hear them calling:

“One, two, three for Bert. I see you, Ted. One, two, three. Now where’s Weezy? Come on, Weezy; Bert’s it.”

“I’ll just stay hid,” thought Weezy. But that did not satisfy the others.

“We—ee—eezy!” they called, and then after a little, “Come on, Weezy, we’re not going to play this any more.”

Louise did not move from her hollow tree, and, at last, knowing she must have found a good hiding place, they began to search for her, but as they hunted, calling “Weezy, Weezy,” they were all going farther and farther from her hiding place.

It was very still. Weezy peeped out, and then crept out of the tree, still keeping behind it.

How easy it is to get lost in the woods, especially if you are a little girl, and never give much thought to east and west, nor remember which way you ran.

Weezy grew frightened, and called, but her sweet little voice did not reach the other three, who were now eagerly looking and calling, but going towards home.

“Where do you s’pose she can be, Ted?” asked Bert anxiously.

“I don’t know. She must have gone the wrong way. Perhaps she has gone back to the log. We’d better run quick and see.”

Running and calling, calling, they came to the place where they could see the rocks. Looking up, they saw the boy. Beside him stood Weezy, a little fairy on the rocks, with bright hair blowing in the wind. Suddenly the boy disappeared. And then—they could hardly believe their eyes—Weezy no longer stood there in the sunshine. Weezy, too, had vanished.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY ON THE ROCKS

IN trying to find Ruth and her cousins, Louise, without knowing it, had run farther and farther away from them.

“Oh, dear,” she thought, “p’raps they’ll s’pose I’ve gone home, and they’ll go, and I’ll be all alone in the woods.”

This idea frightened her so much, that when she found herself near the rocks, nearer than they had ever been, and, looking up, saw the boy playing softly on his flute, she called to him happily:

“Could I come up there? I’m all alone. I’ve been so scared.”

He showed her how easy it was from that side, to run up a long sloping rock, covered

with moss; then helped her over some loose boulders, and up to the highest rock. But on their side it was a soft, grassy spot, dropping away suddenly in one place like a deep step. What looked like vanishing to the group in the woods, who saw only straight rocks, was, to Weezy and the boy, simply dropping into the grass on their side.

“Oh,” sighed Weezy, “it’s beautiful up here. I’m not scared any more. My name is Louise, but they call me ‘Weezy’. We like the way you play your flute. Lots of times we’ve come to hear it.”

“Yes,” said the boy, “I’ve seen you. Here’s my window.”

He showed her an opening between two rocks. Weezy looked, and jumped to her feet.

“Oh, they’re there on the log. Do you care if they come up? It’s just my cousins and Ruth. They’d love to come up here.”

“All right,” said the boy. “Let’s call them.”

They stood up, and the boy gave a long peculiar whistle, ending on a high note. The three on the log waved joyfully and came running towards them.

Very soon they were all together on the grassy slope.

“This is Ruth Price,” said Weezy; “and Ted and Bert Graham. You haven’t told me your name.”

The boy hesitated a moment, looking down at his bare feet and ragged trousers. At that moment, from a dilapidated farmhouse, far below them, on the other side, a fretful old voice called, “Jake! Jake!”

“He is calling me,” said the boy quietly. “But I’m not going.”

“Is he your father?” asked Bert bluntly.

“Oh, no. My father looks like a Prince, and he walks so straight.”

“So do you,” said Ruth. “I noticed that.”

“My father trained me. Every day I walk with a heavy bundle on my head. See, like

this," and he picked up a flat stone, put it on his head, and paced up and down. "You have to walk right if you are carrying something on your head."

They all tried it, but not with stones. Three sweaters, tied into a bundle, made a good weight.

"My goodness, we'll have to practice a lot," said Ruth.

"Yes. It isn't just keeping the bundle on our heads, but it's to have it, and walk along free and easy as if we didn't know it was there."

"Let's go barefooted," said Ted. "It's so warm and nice up here."

"Let's have lunch," said Bert when the shoes and stockings were put with the sweaters. "Have lunch with us, Jake. We've got lots of sandwiches."

The boy gladly joined them. His pale face had a thin, hungry look.

As they sat in the grass together, enjoying

the sandwiches, while the warm wind blew over them, the voice called again:

“Jake! Ja—a—ke!”

“Oh, dear,” thought Weezy. “He’s such a nice boy. I wish his name wasn’t Jake.”

The boy smiled. “I’m not going. He would give me one potato, and one slice of bread, without any butter, and tea perhaps, warmed up from yesterday. I haven’t had anything like this sandwich for a long time. And I haven’t even seen a cookie since my aunt went away.”

“Well,” said Bert, much puzzled, “if he isn’t your father, and if he doesn’t give you good things to eat, I should think you wouldn’t stay there.”

“I have to stay. You see, my father isn’t coming home for almost a year, and I was to stay with my aunt. It was nice for a while, but then she got married, and the man had to go to California, and didn’t want me.”

“Didn’t you have any more aunts?”

“No. I haven’t anybody else. My aunt

didn't have time to find someone to come to the house, so she locked it up and took me to Mr. Fincham, because she had heard he was wanting a boy, just for company. She said she'd write and tell my father where to find me, so I've got to stay there."

"But why don't you write to your father and tell him all about it," asked Ted.

The boy hesitated, then looking from one friendly face to another, he said:

"I'll tell you all about it. Mr. Fincham is all right. I mean he's good and honest, but he never wants me to wear my good clothes; and he's kept me wearing these old rags till now, . . . well, I may as well laugh about it. I've grown right out of my good clothes. They look so funny. I can't wear 'em any more, and all my shoes are too short. He's going to sell them, and then he'll give me the money."

"Won't he get new clothes for you?"

"No, he says I don't need anything now, and it's good for me to go barefoot. He hid

my money right near his. Sometimes we count it, but he won't let me buy anything. And I can't write to my father, because Mr. Fincham lost the address. He was real sorry, but he says probably father will be coming soon."

"Why, I think it's just dreadful," said Ruth. "What do you do, all by yourself?"

"Oh, I stay outdoors all day long. I'll show you some of the things I do. Come down to the old mill race; we'll walk along the tow-path, just a little way. Come softly."

They tiptoed after him, hardly breathing. As he came to some thick bushes, they saw him gently lift a little mother bird from her nest, stroke her feathers, and then put her back.

"What was it?" whispered Weezy, as they went on.

"Vireo. Listen, I hear a kingfisher."

"Noisy old things, aren't they?" said Bert.

“I know where the nest is. Just a little farther, in the side of the bank.”

When they came up to it, he put his hand and arm in as far as he could reach.

“It’s no use,” he said, “the nest is in so far; but I know it’s there. I watched them building it. They put funny things in their nests, fish bones and stuff like that. Sh! Look. There he is.”

“Where?”

“On that dead limb.”

“Oh! How did he do that?”

Ruth and Weezy could hardly keep quiet in their excitement, for the old kingfisher had suddenly dived ker-splash into the water, and then there he was again, on his dead limb, with a struggling fish in his bill.

The fish was too big for him, and he had to kill it with his sharp beak, then he tried over and over to swallow it; almost choked, but finally got it down.

“My goodness! I didn’t think he could do it,” laughed Ted.

“Oh, hear the redbird, the cardinal,” said Ruth, trying to whistle as he did, and doing very well at that.

Then the boy whistled, the bird answered; back and forth went the calls, while the bird came nearer, and finally, when Jake motioned to the others to keep back, the beautiful bird fluttered near his head and seemed about to settle on his shoulder.

“How *can* you do it?” said Weezy.

“It’s just because they see me every day, I guess, and I’ve learned their calls. The squirrels come, too. It’s easy to tame them.”

“My, you must have lots to tell in school; Nature Study class,” said Bert admiringly.

“Well, but you see, I can’t go to school. My aunt got the books for me, and then when Mr. Fincham began coaxing me to sell everything—I hid ‘em, and I hid my flute and some other things. I’ll show you, if you won’t tell.”

They climbed the rocks again, and standing on the grassy slope, the boy hesitated.

“You surely won’t tell if I show you?”

“Honest we won’t, Jake,” said Ted. “Here, we’ll give you our Blue Domers’ promise.”

They clasped hands, taking the boy into the circle, too, and said:

“If you tell me a secret, it’s a stone dropped in deep water.”

“I like that,” said the boy. “Now I’ll show you everything.”

They crept back among the rocks, now up, now down, and at last came to a tiny cave. It was so small they had to take turns going in.

When each one had squeezed inside, and had seen his treasures dimly, Ted said:

“Aren’t you afraid to leave such nice books, and your flute and everything up here in the rocks?”

“Nobody comes up here. The squirrels never touch anything, and that rock shelf is always dry. Rain can’t reach it. I’ll show you my books.”

He passed them out, one at a time.

“Geography, that’s easy. History, I’ve read it twice. Arithmetic, awfully easy, isn’t it?”

“Gracious, no!” said Ruth. “I think it’s terrible. All those problems, miserable old tanks and pipes and gallons, and when you get the answer you don’t know whether it’s inches or gallons.”

“I think geography is worse,” said Weezy. “All the rivers, and capitals and mountains. I can’t remember where they are, nor which is which.”

“They’re all of ‘em bad enough,” said Bert, “but I like to worry along with ‘em; we’ve got such a dandy school.”

“I *wish* I could go,” said the boy sadly.

“Say, Jake; do you know what? I’ll betcha,” said Bert, all excitement, “bet you could wear some of Ted’s clothes, and come go to school with us. Could he, Ted?”

“Look,” said Ted, “you are only a little

bit taller. I believe you could. Wouldn't that be jolly?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that. Thank you, but I couldn't. Everything will be all right when my father comes back. I wrote a letter and put it under the door, after my aunt went away, so that if he should come some day, without writing, he'd know where to find me. And up here on the rocks I could see him coming to Mr. Fincham's. I can see both roads"

"But I thought you said your aunt was going to write and tell your father where to find you," said Ted.

"She forgets sometimes, and she writes so fast she can hardly read it herself. And sometimes letters get lost. My letter is in plain sight, poked under the door. He'll see it as soon as he goes in."

"Well, anyway," said Ted, "we'll come and see you real often, if you want us to."

"Please do," begged the boy. "I get so lonesome."

“We’ll come Saturday, and we’ll have a picnic. Sandwiches and cake and lots of things; so you needn’t mind, Jake, that you can’t bring anything.”

“But I can,” he said happily. “Something good, too. Butternuts. I gathered them myself last Fall.”

“Yummy. Wish ‘twas Saturday,” said Bert.

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID KENT

“Look, Weezy,” said Ruth as they walked home from school the next afternoon. “I’ve found a penny,” and she held it out proudly on the palm of her hand.

“It’s an Indian penny. Where was it?”

“Right there on the sidewalk. Just as we crossed over. What shall we do with it?”

“Let’s take a penny walk.”

“All right, that’ll be fun.”

“Heads to the right, tails to the left. You toss it first. You found it.”

“It’s heads,” said Ruth, “so we’ll have to go a block on Cherry Street.”

“I don’t know anybody on this street, ’cept Mary Miller. She lives in that white house. Her father’s a dentist.”

“And Johnny Coleman lives over there. I don’t like him. His hands are dirty.”

“See the pretty kitten up in the tree.”

“Oh, Weezy. See the little white rabbits back there in that pen.”

“Let’s run to the corner.”

“Why did you want to run all at once?” asked Ruth, panting.

“I’m afraid of that boy. I don’t know his name. He’s awfully rough.”

“Now you toss, Weezy. Heads again. All right, then we’ll go along Chase Street.”

At the next corner the Indian head turned up again.

“Now what do we do? If we keep on

turning right, we'll get back where we started."

"Don't you remember," said Ruth, "you can go twice to the right, or to the left, but if it happens three times, then you go straight ahead."

On they went, turning one way and another, till at last they reached a street quite new to them.

"Look, Ruth, what a pretty little house? Such nice big trees and birdhouses in 'em."

"And a swing in the back yard."

"Ruth," cried Weezy, "see the tall man going up to the door? See, he's unlocking it. That's Mr. Kent. Don't you know? He's visiting at our house. Uncle Richard asked him to stay a few days, 'cause he's lost his sister. I'm so s'prised. What do you 'pose he's going in there for?"

"Did he ever say anything about it?"

"I never heard him. He's always talking about David and his sister that he can't find. Isn't it funny. I wonder if Uncle Richard

knows he has a key to that house. Where are we, Ruth? What street is this?"

"I don't know. It wasn't marked. There's the town clock striking five. We must hurry home. Mother'll be wondering where I am."

"Yes. Let's hurry. Wonder what the boys have been doing."

Reaching the boys' home first, they found Bert and Ted cleaning out the Martin house.

"Where've you been?" asked Bert.

"We took a penny walk and we saw Mr. Kent looking for his sister. He had the key to a pretty house. Isn't that queer?"

"I wonder—"

"Louise," called Mrs. Graham from the window, "Your mother wants you."

"Thank you, Auntie, I'll run all the way."

As Weezy scampered home, an idea was growing in her mind.

"I'm not going to tell anybody, 'cause it would be nice to find out all by myself. But how can I do it?"

As she ran in the house, she called, "Here

I am, Mother," and then, "O, Mother, how beautiful you look."

Her mother smiled and kissed her. "We are going to the city for the theatre, stay over night, and tomorrow we'll do some shopping," she said. "Miss Lowell asked if you could take your music lesson early in the afternoon, so I have arranged with your teachers at school. You are excused for the afternoon. Keep out in the sunshine, after your music lesson. We'll be home no later than five o'clock."

The next morning at school Weezy could hardly keep her mind on her lessons. Over and over she asked herself, "Will I dare do it, all by myself?"

When lunch was over and the boys had gone back to school, she ran to their mother.

"Auntie, please," she begged, "if I'll be real careful, could I take Ted's blue suit for—for something? I'll bring it back about four or five o'clock."

"Why, yes, dear. Shall I wrap it up?"

“Yes, please. I’ll be careful of it.”

“You’ll be more careful than Ted, I am sure.”

It was a long walk to Miss Lowell’s, but Louise could walk miles without tiring, and each step brought her nearer to the thing she had planned to do.

“What’s the big bundle?” asked Miss Lowell when she came to the door.

“It’s—it’s just an errand. Something after my lesson.”

“Oh, my dear. Didn’t you get my telephone message? I have to go in town on the next train. I can’t give you a lesson today. Joanna said she would tell you.”

“I was gone, I s’pose,” said Louise. “It’s all right. I like to walk.”

She turned happily away. “Now I’ll have all the afternoon, and I’m not scared. I’m going to the rocks all alone.”

Swinging her bundle and singing softly to herself, she sped through the woods; but before she reached the rocks, she heard the

sweet notes of the flute, then a redbird. Was it bird or boy?"

When she came to the log she hid the bundle, but her sweater pockets bulged.

"Ja—a—ake," she called, "I want to see you a minute."

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you. Shall I come down?"

"No, I'll come up."

"Then I'll help you."

When they reached the top, Weezy pulled the lumpy packages from her sweater pockets.

"I brought you some ginger bread and a drum stick. Do you like the drum stick? I love 'em."

"Oh, yes, I do, too. And I'm so hungry today. Thank you. You're awfully kind. When my father gets back from Brazil, I'll do something nice for you."

Weezy thought, "Oh, dear, if I only knew my geography better, I'd know where Brazil is. I guess it's in Africa." But she said

nothing, waiting until the hungry boy had finished the drum stick, and the ginger bread.

When not a crumb was left, she still waited, not knowing how to begin. "Why don't I just ask him, and then I'll know," she thought; but instead she asked:

"What is it that you're always playing?"

"'Duna.' Father plays it. I want to play it for him when he comes back."

"*Is your name David Kent?*"

There. She had asked him the question she came for.

The boy leaped up. "No," he said proudly. "No, I am not David Kent. *Not in these rags.*"

Then he dropped sobbing in the grass.

"Oh, you are. You are David Kent. Come quick. Your father has come back. I brought Ted's blue suit. Hurry; you can put it on right over these things and we'll run."

Quite dazed by the good news, and hardly

daring to believe it, the boy flung himself into Ted's suit, and then how they ran!

Stopping only a few times to get their breath, at last they reached Weezy's home, dodged Andrew mowing the lawn, almost ran over Joanna, who was wiping the flagstones of the porch, and stopped at the door of Dr. Stanton's study.

"Uncle Rich—ard," gasped Weezy in a weak little voice. "Here's—Da—vid. I found him, my—own—self."

Joanna came in from the porch. "What-ever is the matter, Miss Louise?" she asked.

"This is David Kent. He wants his father. Where's Mr. Kent, and where's Uncle Richard?"

"Sit down, Miss Louise, do. Sit down, both of you. You look just about spent. They'll be back soon. I'll get you some cool milk."

Joanna came back quickly, bringing two large glasses of rich milk and a plate of cookies. "There," she said kindly. "Better

go out under the trees. You can see them when they turn the corner."

David was so excited at the thought of seeing his father almost any minute, he drank the milk with his eyes on the street. But it was Weezy who first saw the car, and saw that her Uncle Richard was alone.

They ran to meet him. "Uncle Richard, look. Here's David Kent. I found David Kent. Where's his father gone? He wants his father."

Dr. Stanton leaped from the car and, taking the boy by the shoulders, looked earnestly into his face. "Of course you are David Kent," he said. "Of course you are; you look just like your father. Come in, quick. I'll send a wire. He went to Washington this morning to find one of your aunt's friends, who may know where she is."

Sitting down at his desk, Dr. Stanton sent a telegram; then, turning to David, said: "The only thing I can do now is to send this message to the club, but he will not be there

until Saturday night. I think you'd better stay right here with us until he comes."

David looked troubled. "Weezy says my father went to the house, unlocked it and went in, so I don't see why he would go off to Washington."

"Why not, David? He's trying to find you."

"'Cause I left a letter for him. I poked it under the door. I told him I was at Mr. Fincham's."

"Poor David. Your aunt did not write the name clearly. He thought it was Farnham. We've been trying to find Mr. Farnham."

"I drew a little map to show him how to get there. Why didn't he come to find me? He didn't need anything but the map," said David, blinking hard to keep back the tears."

"I can't understand that myself. All he thinks of is to find you."

"P'raps it was dark in the hall," said

Weezy. "P'raps he stepped right over it and did not see it."

"My father sees everything. If there was a pin, or just a little bit of a scrap of paper, he'd see it; and this was a big letter, in an envelope."

"It is strange. I should think he would have come right back."

"Perhaps," said David, "he had to go to Washington anyway. Perhaps there was something else, awfully important, and he had to go there first, and then he'll come and find me. I think I must go back to Mr. Fincham's. He might come and I wouldn't be there."

"Then Weezy and I will drive you back. I want to know how to reach the place quickly, and I want to see Mr. Fincham. But let's have dinner first. Will it be all right if you are not there for dinner?"

David glanced at Weezy with a comical expression, but answered politely: "I can

stay; thank you, Dr. Stanton. I'd like to very much."

"There are only the three of us tonight," said Uncle Richard, as they went to the dining room, "but last night your father sat in this very chair; so you take it tonight, and be happy, knowing how soon you'll see him."

David's eyes shone with joy. The pretty home, the delicious dinner, but most of all, the thought that he would soon see his dear father again.

CHAPTER X.

HOME FROM THE ROCKS

"I DON'T think you can go up our roads with this big car," said David. "Nobody does, and the mud is too deep."

"Then we'll leave the car here, and walk up. We all three like to walk."

As they drew near the house, they saw old Mr. Fincham come out on the little side porch and wash his hands in a small tin basin, which he afterwards hung on a nail above the bench.

“Your dinner’s cold, Jake,” he said, as they reached the porch.

“I’ve had my dinner, Mr. Fincham,” said David. “And here’s Dr. Stanton, who brought me back, and Louise Allison.”

The old man looked at them coldly, and asked them to come in.

How pleasant that large room might have been. But day and night, summer and winter, the shutters were closed. There was a fine fireplace, but it was boarded up. Across the front of it there was a hard wooden bench of the plainest type, without a back. As for other furniture, there were two odd-looking chairs, made from barrels, an old three-legged milking stool, a table with a dull brown cover, and on the table a small coal-oil lamp.

Mr. Fincham lit this rather hesitatingly, and asked them to sit down.

“How has David stayed here?” thought Uncle Richard. “It is the gloomiest place I have ever seen.”

And Weezy, who loved sunshine and beauty, seeing the dark brown walls, the dark brown ceiling, the strange furniture, and the dreary little coal-oil lamp, said to herself: “I believe I’d rather stay on the rocks all the time, with the squirrels and the rabbits, than to be in this dreadful place.”

“My father has come home,” said David. “He’s in Washington now, and he’ll come for me some day soon.”

The old man sank back in his barrel chair, turned very pale, and said in a trembling voice, “Why, Jake, Jake, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

David, a healthy outdoor boy, was a sound sleeper. He never had known that the old man had come to his room at night, holding

the feeble lamp, looking down at him as he slept, and murmuring, "So like my little brother, Jake."

"Why, I believe Mr. Fincham likes me," thought David, and did not know what to say.

"Mr. Kent has been with me for three days," said Dr. Stanton. "His sister did not tell him clearly how to find your house, and the name, as she wrote it, looked like Farnham. He will be back by Monday, I think, and, of course, he will want his son. You will miss the boy, of course, but must you stay here? You could find a quiet home in town."

The old man looked at him fiercely, and shook his head. "No," he said, "I like this. Years ago I was a 'blanket man' out West. Do you know what a 'blanket man' is? It's a fellow that works in a lumber camp, and in between times he wanders 'round, rolls up in a blanket and sleeps under the stars. I can't do it now, I'm too old. But I don't

like trains, automobiles and people. Just Jake."

"Mr. Fincham, please show them your boxes. Some of those new ones. They're such beauties."

"Aw, Jake, I don't think they'd care about 'em. Get 'em if you want to. I don't care."

"Please 'scuse the light a minute," said David, and went into another room, returning soon with a large basket on his arm, which he put on the table, first placing the lamp safely in the center. He took from the basket one box after another. Hand-made boxes, beautifully carved.

"See," said David, "he whittles them out just with his penknife and puts 'em together. This one is made out of an old cedar fence rail. Doesn't it smell sweet? It's been rubbed and rubbed with linseed oil. Here's one that has a white star set in. That's made from the old boxwood tree that died."

“Oh, they are lovely,” cried Weezy. “Aren’t they wonderful, Uncle Richard? See this teeny tiny one, with an acorn for a handle.”

“They are very, very beautiful,” said Uncle Richard. “They are made so perfectly. I have never seen anything like them.

“Oh, see the little weenie hinges on this one,” said Weezy.

“Lots of these are made out of old cigar boxes, and sometimes cigar boxes have little hinges instead of cloth or paper,” explained David.

“They are so soft,” said Weezy, rubbing one against her cheek.

But Mr. Fincham cared nothing for their praise. He could only think of one thing. In a few days “Jake” would be gone.

That evening he could not whittle as usual, and finally put away his knife.

“Shall we count our money, Jakie?”

“I don’t care.”

They took the lamp and went to an unused kitchen at the end of the house. This old room had an immense fireplace, with a heavy iron bar well up in the chimney, from which kettles had hung, simmering and bubbling, a century or more ago. From this bar now, Mr. Fincham took an old iron teakettle and a heavy tin pail.

“You know, Jakie,” he said, “I’ve always told you, if a house burns down, usually the chimney stands.”

He opened the pail and poured out upon the table silver dollars, gold-pieces, pennies, dimes, nickels, quarters and fifty-cent pieces. They counted it solemnly, as they had done many times before.

“It’s all there,” said the old man. “Well, you’ll be glad to go. I don’t blame you.” Suddenly he dropped his head upon the table, and David knew he was crying.

“Please don’t, Mr. Fincham,” begged David. “I’ll come to see you lots of times. Honest I will. I ought to have stayed with

you more, instead of being up in the rocks all the time. And I ought to have come when you called me. I'm sorry now. I've got some books I'll give you, and you can sell 'em if you want to. I'll get 'em tomorrow morning. I don't need the books any more, when the stuff is in my head."

* * * * * * *

The next morning Weezy stood at the gate, waiting for Ruth to go to school with her. She had waved good-bye to Uncle Richard, off on an early call; had run back to say once more to Joanna, "You'll listen hard for the telephone, won't you. It *might* be Mr. Kent." And had just returned to the gate, when she gasped with surprise, for there was David's father, coming with long strides down the quiet street.

"O, Mr. Kent," squealed Weezy, running to meet him and clasping his hand, "I found David. I know where he is this minute."

"Where is he, dear child? I got the telegram and came at once."

“He’s up in the rocks. We can go right away. I’ll tell Joanna. I don’t have to go to school. We can go across the fields and through the woods, and he’ll be there.”

She flew into the house, asked Joanna to tell Ruth, and off they started.

“I can’t understand, Louise,” said Mr. Kent. “Why is my boy in the woods?”

“He’s a regular Blue Domer—he likes to be outdoors, and it’s dark and gloomy at Mr. Fincham’s.”

Then she told him of their trips to the woods, of hearing the “magic flute,” and of climbing, at last, up on the rocks to talk with the boy, whose name seemed to be Jake.

“Mr. Fincham has been good to him, but he sold his clothes and things, and put the money away for him. Poor David couldn’t go to school, but I don’t think he needs to very much. He knows all those books by heart.”

“But what made you think he was my David?”

“Because he’s always playing ‘Duna,’ and you whistle it sometimes when you’re thinking hard; and his voice sounds like yours, only younger.”

When they reached the woods, Mr. Kent put Weezy on his shoulder, laughing, as he said, “We’ll get there sooner this way.” And very soon indeed they reached the rocks. There sat David with his flute, but this time he was practicing scales. Then suddenly he played “Duna.”

The strong man trembled and put Weezy down. In silence they stood until the boy had finished the last note; then, as they walked swiftly up the grassy slope, David’s father gave a long, peculiar whistle. The boy turned, unbelieving, then with a great cry of joy, flew to his father’s arms.

In the meanwhile Ruth, much puzzled, walked to school alone and found Bert and Ted.

“Weezy’s got a secret.”

“Where is she?”

“She went off with Mr. Kent. She isn’t coming to school this morning.”

“That’s funny.”

Afternoon came, and still no Weezy; but when they reached home, Ruth and the boys found they were invited to Weezy’s for dinner. This was a surprise, but there was a bigger one waiting for them.

“Why—it’s Jake. Hello, Jake, how did you get here?”

“This is David Kent,” said Weezy proudly. “There isn’t any ‘Jake’. It was just a nickname Mr. Fincham gave him.”

Leaving the youngsters to talk it over, Mr. Kent and Uncle Richard sat with Weezy’s father and mother, talking and planning.

“I find I cannot leave my boy,” said Mr. Kent. “I have that house, where David lived with his aunt, but I do not like the street. I want to find a house with large grounds such as you have, Mr. Allison. Then I’ll find a housekeeper. David and I

will have a home, and I can write for a few years, while David is in school."

"There's the place next door to us," said Weezy's father. "We have the key here. We might take a look at it after dinner."

Such a happy group around the table, and when dinner was over, what fun it was to go to the beautiful house next door and look it over from top to bottom. It seemed just right. The house was in good order, needing only a little fresh paint and paper. In a very short time they could move in.

The next day David and his father went to their old house to prepare for packing the things they would keep. As they came up to the door David said:

"Father, did you find my letter?"

"What letter do you mean? Where was it?"

"I poked it under the door."

"I came in the front door, as we are doing now, but there was no letter here."

They stepped inside, leaving the door

wide open. David, glancing back, caught sight of a spot of white on the floor.

“Look, father.”

His father stooped and pulled the letter from its hiding place. David, in pushing it under the door, had also pushed it under the heavy rug.

They looked at each other and smiled happily. “It’s all right now,” said David.

That afternoon, when school was out, Mr. Kent watched his boy, neatly dressed, his rags forgotten, dashing over the lawn as he helped the others fly a kite.

“He has forgotten his hardships and loneliness,” he thought, “and, after all, he is strong and rugged. The experience has done him no harm.”

When David and his father went to see Mr. Fincham, and Mr. Kent, surprised at the beauty of the hand-made boxes, offered to buy them all, and many more, to hold his rare butterflies, the poor old man could hardly believe his good luck. But with Sum-



Mr. Kent watched his boy dashing over the lawn as he helped the others fly a kite.
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(The Blue Domers and the Magic Flute.)

mer coming on, they could not persuade him to leave his lonely home.

“Perhaps,” he said, “when I see Winter coming around the corner, perhaps I’ll take that big room you offer me, and thank you kindly.”

Saturday came, and the Blue Domers wanted their picnic. And now David could fill a basket with good things, instead of having only butternuts to add to the feast. When Uncle Richard and Mr. Kent decided to go, there were whoops of delight. What a picnic it was. High up on the rocks, with the blue sky above them. Mr. Kent had brought his wonderful microscope, which was strong enough to show the movement of green in a leaf, like a swift river. This, and many other wonders they saw, without stirring from the rocks.

They stayed until the moon came up. David played his flute, and played very sweetly, many songs they all knew, but when his father took it and played “Duna,” he,

who had at one time thrilled great audiences, the little group beside him felt it was indeed a magic flute that they heard.

THE END.





